

## ARTS200/SOC231 LECTURE, SEMINAR SIX, 7 SEPT 2004

To begin:

- consider the issue of subjectivity as it emerged in Kant's notion of beauty and in children's art.
- Here, main point is that art becomes transformative: after encountering beauty, we are not the same as we were; after engaging in art (e.g. automatic writing, finger painting, sand sculpting) we are not the same as we were; [after/during being in love, we cease to be the same as we were].
- It is not a matter of invoking a general theory of subjectivity, but of accounting for the role of practice.
- Recall the Kantian notion of the beautiful and Bourdieu's critique: the beautiful will be known when we experience it; before that, little can be said. Any encounter with the beautiful (which is based in feeling) is also universal. Also called *sensus communis* by Kant (a communal sense).
- Bourdieu does not accept that there is an autonomous entity as the beautiful. Rather, he says that the whole notion of a non-functionalist beauty is a way of excluding the dominated classes from the realm of good taste. Ultimately, there is, for Bourdieu, a political angle on art in this sense.

A jaded art world has long given up on the beautiful. Instead, the market, fashion, the desire to shock, etc, become the basis of art.

A truly beautiful work of art has no purpose: it is its own finality. Beauty does not appear to please the human senses.

Beauty pleases immediately and is its own finality.

### A Contemporary Notion of the Beautiful and Sublime

In his writing, Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe doesn't disagree that the art world has given up on a certain traditional notion of the beautiful, while the beautiful as the frivolous (because it has no purpose) comes to take over from conventional interpretations of the sublime.

- For Kant beauty can be framed, whereas the sublime is formless and cannot be framed.
- For Gilbert-Rolfe, beauty is 'irreducibly feminine' (47).
- The sublime is androgynous.
- Sublime is now the technological sublime.

- 'The beautiful is powerless but always exceeds what frames it, and what always frames it is discourse' (48).
- Beauty is now in the frivolous, the attractive, the glamorous – all these are without purpose. Gilbert-Rolfe says:

'By thinking of the beautiful as glamorous I seek to make it into a secular concept which, in its substitution of frivolity for faith (in doubt), could escape from secularisation instituted as an ideal...' (49).

- The 'pleasures of' appearance' become central.
- Glamour is 'better than goodness' because, as beauty, it escapes from concepts. It gives a certain freedom.
- G-R discusses Barnett Newman's work. Newman is a colour-field painter. But let's not dwell on this.
- The fashion photograph is not androgynous.
- The notion of the beautiful is seen most spectacularly in glamour, fashion photography.
- The photography in question is colour photography, where surface dominates.

'Colour photography, unlike paintings and temples, is seamless like the body and the plastic object and a consequence of the same industrial technology that gave the impressionists alizarin...[colour red derived from madder root]' (p. 33)

### Glamour

Note that form and formlessness are key notions here. Colour is on the side of formlessness. But photography focuses – gives form to – colour. The sublime object is indeterminate.

- Glamour is the attractively unproductive.
- Form (drawing, for example) is linked to seriousness, while the formless tends towards a lack of seriousness.
- The Industrial Revolution also gave rise to the visibility of formlessness – as in J.M.W. Turner's paintings.
- Beauty's 'uselessness lies in its being that which can't be reduced to its critique...' (69)
- NB: Beauty's frivolousness gives rise to subversiveness: 'because it's always a distraction from the worthwhile, which lets us know it's worthwhile by not being beautiful' (69).
- Beauty, then is the opposite of productive thought, hence the link between advertising and beauty, according to Gilbert-Rolfe.
- No anxieties about power in beauty, therefore it is not male.
- But can the fashion object be beautiful if always more or less symmetrical?

- Beauty (as feminine) challenges the dominance of reason = beauty challenges power.
- Drawing (form-giving) is also tied to reason and therefore to power.
- Beauty now uses the 'language of photography'.
- 'The condition of the photograph is one of simultaneity, flawlessness, intensification...' (77).
- Painting is serious, while colour photography is frivolous.

**We note** that Gilbert-Rolfe concludes his discussion by postulating that beauty is (now?) 'flawless' and blank (80). Blank = the face of the fashion model.